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Song of the scorpion

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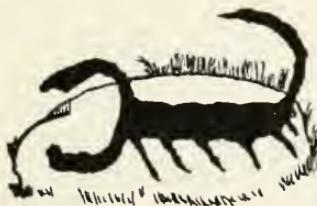
**SONG  
OF THE  
SCORPION**

*by Percy Adams*



# SONG OF THE SCORPION

*a book of satire*



*By*

PERCY ADAMS

Author of "The Hull And The Grain"

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To "LABOR",

(Washington, D.C.) for "The Ear Of The Sloth", "Profit And Loss" and "The Monkeys' Election".

To The Reader:

The aim here, with few exceptions, is not to write for the tower-dweller but for the people with the hope that they will understand without the aid of an interpreter. If it be counted less than art to do this, I shall still be happy about the whole affair. Grant me a tiny corner in the human heart and the world can keep the oyster. While satire may not be to everybody's taste, it is nevertheless true that its underlying goal is human betterment. Lastly, the worth of a poem is not to be assessed by turbot-eyed critics but by its appeal to the individual reader, who is the final judge and, to me, the one that matters.

Percy Adams

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## THE TOAD AND THE LOUSE

He drowsed before the picture tube,  
Nor sensed the change of scene  
When the bleat of commerce ended  
And a toad came on the screen.

The quiet woke the sleeper  
Who gaped in disbelief  
While the reptile donned his glasses  
And rearranged his brief.

“I was once a politician,”  
He announced in heavy tones,  
“And, like you, a lawyer also  
With dishonor in my bones.

“Now you see me serving durance  
For my surreptitious schemes  
And the deeds that fouled the prospect  
With the smoke of voters’ dreams.

“My talents grew upon me  
And with mortgage funds to spend  
I glittered in the sunshine  
Till I met a grievous end.

“The world was ripe for plucking  
And I reached without remorse  
Till it chanced that I was bitten  
By an undertaker’s horse.

“The doctors rushed to save me,  
Still the poison had its way  
And the wretched process ended  
When I popped up from the clay.

“My former colleagues loathe me  
When they see me in the dust,

For I live on grubs and insects  
Now that gold has turned to rust.

“My soul long since exploded,  
Like a bubble in the mud,  
And the judge I ate at Christmas  
Is still swimming in my blood.

“Oh, brother-politician,  
Though your guile may charm the House;  
Can’t you see black horses dancing  
At your rebirth as a louse?

“Tune me out and let me wander  
Where no scruple ever shows;  
There’ll be tongues adrip in toad-land  
When you come to plague the rose.”

## POLITICS

Misled by this man’s pose and that man’s shout  
To douse the sunrise and confirm the doubt,  
Nor marshal wit to counter wisdom’s rout.

## FREE SPEECH

Somewhere ahead lie adult lands  
Where justice walks with fame  
And ill decrees go down to dust  
In the archives of shame.

## T.K.O.

‘In God we trust’, the coin declares.  
The left hook takes me unawares  
And fogs my wits. I lift my eyes  
And groggily apologize.

## MISSISSAUGA RATTLER

And the angel spake from the lookout:  
 "Behold, one cometh as a serpent;  
 the sun hideth its face in the clouds  
 and knoweth the hour of frustration,  
 and the birds and the flowers lament  
 for him that hath all yet hath nothing."

Book of Light

## INDICTMENT

Look!

See how they spill from nature's maw  
 and ground in the shoals;  
 dwarfs in the delta  
 dipping dripping values  
 from the silt at low tide:  
 genius immersed in the gumbo of frustration,  
 poets plucking stringless lyres,  
 writers on a leash,  
 singers on a cracking bough,  
 dancers aquiver in death throes of grace,  
 dramatists bearing odors,  
 politicians braced in the rut,  
 big wheels with locked brakes  
 sitting at the light;  
 multitudes of gapers  
 silhouetted in a world afire,  
 nor reaching for a hose from womb to tomb;  
 yeas and nays polishing with allegiance  
 the facets of existence  
 that picture the retreat from Jerusalem.

Unfold the blazoned sheet;  
 behold the bumpered avenues of iniquity:  
 crime, lust, rackets, auctions on the jetty;  
 man in His image coursing waters

filagreed with the blood of Jesus.  
Movie moth in the spotlight,  
world leaders in the wings till crisis screams  
and the monster rears  
and the lost tribes teeter  
and the altar trembles  
and the tears of the Lord  
run down the stained-glass window.

Passions mauling nature;  
detonations in the north,  
detonations in the south,  
poison in the bone  
and the mouth of posterity.

Reports from Arabia:  
wares shrieking to infinity,  
eager hordes plodding sand  
to green the bailiff's future.

Cafeteria:  
gossip, rumor, scandal, fashions, comics, puzzles,  
aid for the witless;  
adults absorbed with whizzing discs,  
clouted spheres and clutched ovals;  
mass acclaim;  
death on the ropes,  
encore.

Muffled thunder from the masthead:  
giants mouldering,  
truth on a tether,  
dwarfs in the hollows of achievement.

Low skies in the casino,  
kites moving earthward,  
rust on the rails,  
austerity's dull blade crumbling the cake,  
abortion in a green skirt, weeping,  
soothsayers stammering;  
after the descent the patched balloon.

Culture's brigands raiding the fireside:  
fusillades, ricochets;

barroom rhapsodies —  
music from the hip;  
bodies,  
sanity ambushed.  
Praise the arts  
and toss a mask to Beauty  
gasping in the reek.  
Agitation in the pond:  
hucksters' bait and drama's lure vying;  
what but the straining fish can disentangle  
violencepillsvillainyfloorwax,  
virgins on the verge,  
fisticuffshairoilrescuesoapsudsfadeoutfiltertips.  
Play of the week:  
Stale cake between drinks,  
excursions in the groove.  
Blessed is the click.  
Spare me seclusion,  
aroma of pine,  
friends in the wild  
and a sweet-flowing stream.

Footlights:  
glitter, curves, sheathing,  
fare without pith;  
females with wits atwirl  
feasting —  
fricassee of vanity,  
goblets of envy;  
captive males squirming,  
critics wedged in the exit.  
Hit of the year:  
Dame Art with a syringe —  
rutting in the woods,  
stag and hind ecstasy,  
true love achieved in a canal movement.  
Puppets cleaving to a frayed line  
knotted to a pay cheque.

"Our text this evening . . . "

Relax, eager one:

seek not the oat in the barren manger.

What dwarf spitteth out the gag  
and stirreth up the people?

The throng is on its own,  
like children darting into traffic;  
the crossing guard was expendable.

Pray and beseech;  
the heavens open not;  
tomorrow the urgent foot and clutching hand.

Rejoice! dark prince, and stuff your ears  
with crackling music and the coins' jingle;  
cram them till your skull is riven  
and the desecrated temple falls  
and you, forever, lie beneath a monument of rubble.

Let the bright ones disperse  
on the edge of learning,  
shoulder into leadership  
and be the heaviness of history.  
Tremble not for the mother lode;  
the paltry dime assures title,  
yet none will be trampled  
and few found missing from the tents of ignorance.  
To each according to desire and capacity,  
but beware of dusty tomes;  
ethics are as friction to the drum.  
Free-wheeling speeds arrival —  
mansion or penitentiary.

Compose the remnants with music;  
the disc goes round the clock.  
In the cool of the dark  
and the heat of noon  
the pitch will be as ice cubes in the blood.  
Shelley, a din has stormed the memory;  
soft voices sank in the ooze  
when jazz broke surface.

Bookrack:

crawling harvest —  
weevils in the wheat.  
He who feeds and retches not  
has no problem of selection.  
Behold the measure of the dwarf  
who plops down a manhole  
and comes up with diamonds —  
and insults to God on the hilltop.  
Critics whisper among themselves,  
like hypocrites apologizing to angels,  
deploring the worn trumpet  
and the lost rebel note;  
but not out loud,  
not with the virtue of reveille.  
The ear of the ass is sharp  
and the guillotine has edge also.

What of the twilight?

Is there one clear flame,  
one heavened voice that makes for love and reason?  
He that serveth a lie  
shall be as a howling dog  
at the gate of the City.  
We who dwell in hovels of unworthiness:  
we who clutch the bribe  
and renounce the just intolerance,  
we who build a palace  
and shut our ears to the shelterless  
and our eyes to the last day;  
we who flinch and tremble  
and bear false witness,  
we who turn aside  
and align not our feet with the radiance,  
yet may astonish our souls  
and prepare an honest brief  
as we approach the rim;  
and acknowledge before the court  
that with the sun in the way

we failed to see the light.  
Wherefore shall lies deliver us  
when the deed is graved in fire on the mountain-face?  
But stay, who is knocking at my door at this hour?  
Could be the fist of conformity.  
But this knock is gentle,  
as though all the love and kindness in the world  
were seeking entry with soft insistence.

Light of my life!  
Come in, Jesus.  
Surely the flowers of springtime  
will envy the welcome  
only the breast may offer.  
You must be tired, Master,  
such a far journey;  
hitch-hiking, too, I fear.  
The strange thumb in a miscreant world  
begets the aching arch.  
Do sit down and let me wash your feet.  
You'll be safe here in the secret ventricle  
and well provisioned with the loaf of love  
and the wine of sincerity.  
The high priests of the shadows,  
who believe not the bud till it opens,  
will not dream you passed the barricade  
even as amber music filtering through the haze.  
Lord of the divine answer!  
We must confer together.  
We in dwarfland who aspire  
to focus sunbeams on the haunts of darkness  
are like stray fireflies making brave in a blackout.  
Do not be perturbed by the night sounds.  
What you hear is only the serpent  
hissing threats to a few insurgent dwarfs  
protesting the demolition of a cathedral  
to make room for bomb shelters.

## SILENT NOTE

I went to see him just before the end—  
 A man of probity without a friend,  
 Who spent his essence to enrich the thought  
 Of those who stumble where the light is not.

I burned to ask him why a barren field  
 Should rate devotion when no faintest yield  
 Had prospered courage or inspired the will  
 To raze the fortress on the bitter hill.

He sang of justice with a rebel throat,  
 Which banned to silence everything he wrote;  
 For darkness governs in a dagger age  
 That stabs the beauty and befouls the page.

A thousand questions went unasked that night  
 When the heavens parted for a mercy flight.  
 And so a world that failed to recognize  
 His worth, still wonders where the wisdom lies.

## COMES THE RAIN

Down through the years they come and go,  
 Seeking the bread the toil supplied  
 When they marched with the strong till, lo,  
 The vigor drained, the brightness died  
 And they, frail shapes, were thrust aside  
 To wither in the somber glow  
 Of sunset years bereft of pride  
 And sink from sight in tragic flow.

How wan the prospect and the dream  
 Which once made music in the heart:  
 Rich hopes that fueled the eager gleam  
 And urged the hand to play the part;

Prosperity, success and joy —  
All that the effort could attain —  
Was theirs to strive for and employ  
To fend misfortune come the rain.

Dismayed, the shackled angel stands  
And serves the throng. The cold demands  
Of ruling aims reduce the fare  
To crust and crumb for those who share  
The austere bun of charity  
And view the riven parity  
Of stored abundance like to rot  
Lest those who have will profit not.

Who benefits when beauty dies?  
What man of stature shall arise  
And counsel us to dare the deed  
That pleases God and meets the need?  
Sad Lincoln freed the chattel slave,  
But who will stay destruction's wave:  
This force within that crucifies  
The Christ in us and spares the lies.

#### BLIGHT ON THE CORN

I saw a land beset by troubled seas,  
A hollow chieftain steeped in ways outworn  
Pursuing custom's course and veiling pleas  
To nourish roots which suckle barb and thorn;  
Tall men who were in thrall to tuneless strings,  
A multitude that tilled a fertile field  
While chill winds blew and swooping vulture-wings  
Foretold a hunger that rebuked the yield.  
Too much too long, but not of precious will  
To cultivate the soil where beauty flowers  
When head and heart aspire to seed the bill  
And gain the sceptre from defaulting powers.  
How like a withered crop in autumn's frame —  
A harvest lost, a glory dimmed in shame.

## ECHO

Whose lyre shall tell of scented hours  
 While on the stage chaotic powers  
 Distress the scene and mock the prayer  
 With images that leer and stare  
 At humble works of honest men,  
 Which find no crown. The ingrate pen  
 But writes them off to round their days  
 Deep in the red of painful ways;  
 So that plumed thieves may ride the breeze,  
 With eager shears and supple knees,  
 To sun-bold heights and there display  
 The fleece of lambs that came their way.  
 So did Rome revel and contrive  
 To drug the bee and loot the hive  
 Till vengeance swarmed and reason's gate  
 Swung wildly in the blast of fate.

said the oracle

Pillars and props:

let us congregate in the hustings,  
 like swarming bees in search of clover,  
 and listen to the drone of wisdom—  
 to those who prophesy of grazing in rich pastures  
 and aspire to apportion twitch-grass and dandelions  
 for the next five orbits of the sphere.

To each according to his ability to discriminate,  
 to reap or nibble and to secure.

You know how enthusing it is,  
 being fat in experience if lean in wherewithal,  
 even unto the proportions of the hippopotamus  
 and the gaunt hyena.

In passing, let us, out of an overflowing heart  
 and the sides of our mouths,  
 bestow moral support on the patrons of the queue;

'tis better than bread and the belt tightens easier.  
But be of bright spirit;  
if humans have erred and preyed,  
the sea is incorruptible and the good earth also.  
Only the laden hook and vacant platter  
speak with heavy countenance.

Let us, then, in this bewitching hour  
again embrace the winning hag of custom  
and hock the sovereign will to the highest bidder;  
let us pass up the humbugs and grab the peanuts  
and affirm the rights of the elderly  
to bask in hovels and poke merrily in the garbage  
for five of the best sunset years.

Let us lift up the hearts of the money-lenders  
and the buccaneers of the upper deck —  
patriots all, and steeped in the ethics of the stone tablets.  
We who live above the fog and the need for navigation —  
charting the course by the holes in our underwear —  
will get by, like grandfather did,  
on the gleanings that fell off the hayrack.

Let those of small heart and little stomach  
consult the history  
and take hope, while it lingers,  
in the thirty-year flight of the golden balloon  
ere it pops out on another peak of human achievement.

Let us preserve our mental molars from the hard core:  
let us stop up our ears to the rich in leisure  
and abolish the insidious handout,  
which burrows, like a ghosted rat,  
a route to the granary of virtue.

Let us purge the blight that parches the bloom of corporations  
and shrivels the root that suckles the shareholder.

Profit, not sharing, is the cream of our lives  
and butters the bread of those who have it.

Let us snip the leash on enterprise  
and the country will prosper  
even though events may tremble the mountains.

You with the gleam and the noble desire:  
court with honor and diligence

the enticing wench with the green lustre;  
the understanding will arrive in salvoes  
when you sprint for a fox-hole.

But, as you envy the louse its stature,  
beware of tomes and thoughts that probe;  
walk in the cool night  
and let the sunlight blister the unwary.

The bliss of the clod outspans the cord of silver,  
but the wit of the learned is sharpened to misery.

Harken not to agitation for a welfare state  
except for senators  
and a few battalions of V-I-Pees,  
who require striped trousers to foil the tax bite.  
Let no false tongue betray you  
to process sacred cows and come up with porterhouse.  
Let us have more bombs and fewer hospitals and schools  
and places to lay our heads.

Let your allegiance to custom and tradition  
be as rock that is denser than the matte of Sudbury  
and as watchful as party scrutineers;  
for this is the fealty that makes what you see  
and keeps it beautiful.

Fear not the heaven-borne missile,  
but erect a shelter with prudent embrasures  
that you may assist the chance survivor to paradise  
with a buckshot send-off.

Then only shall you come to know the joys of Crusoe —  
the splendid isolation and the heavenly scope —  
till he discovered footprints  
and peace took off like a screech-owl.

But come, proud followers of a riven unity  
and a drifting balloon,  
let us mount the ox cart while darkness holds  
and creak to the polls  
before light breaks from the prairie to far corners,  
and the structure with the built in feature  
sighs out in the bog of obsolescence  
and we, too, make with bubbles.

## BALLAD OF A BERSERK VOTER

From voting day to voting day  
For blinkered years his loyal hand  
Made bird-foot marks — the dullest jay  
That ever spurned a greener land.

He shunned the page that offered light;  
His grandsire willed a fateful tune  
While spectral hopes danced in the night  
That hid the hook and banned the boon.

He honed no scalpel to relieve  
The pressure which besieged the core;  
Tradition bound him to believe  
The lathered word forevermore.

The treadmill where he earned his bread  
Ensured the hunger of his kind.  
“The chief is pleased with me,” he said;  
“I follow him that leads the blind.”

Through war and peace and boom and bust  
He pecked at life like other jays,  
And paid allegiance to unjust  
And minted rule that stole his praise.

Far up the slopes that hemmed him in  
A mansion stood, half in the sky;  
“I, too,” he said, “endorse the sin;  
I’ll have one yet before I die.”

Not till the locust came to dwell  
And spread its blight throughout the land,  
Transforming plenty into hell,  
Did rebel voice assume command.

“O bloodied gill! I’ve been a fish;  
The barb is in my craw,” he said.

“I hear a snap, and heaven’s wish  
Achieves new balance in my head.

“Hand me my torch of lunar white!  
Away with suckerdom desire!  
I storm the cage of Moscow night  
And free the bats with holy fire!

“No more the poor shall rob the rich,  
No more the hope shall snare the throng;  
I now perceive a wily witch  
That rides the world to do it wrong.”

Forthwith he took a flaming brand  
To smite the meek ones of the plain  
And battled with a wilder hand  
Than earth shall ever see again.

The sun stood still to blink and stare,  
The dungeons split with mad applause  
And hell itself moved up to share  
The aims of this outstanding cause.

Morticians prospered where they stood  
And all the rest reworked the mire  
Except the sage, who only could  
Prefer the sacrificial fire.

### THE EAR OF THE SLOTH

The people have been told and told and told  
Ever since the beginning.  
Heaven spoke for eternity  
When it gave the score to Moses.  
Confucius taught from the fount  
And deathless echoes rode the centuries.  
Plato tended a garden next door to the temple  
And the sunflower of virtue shed seed round the sphere.  
Cicero laid siege to paradise

With nine arrows of truth.\*  
Christ came with the key;  
The lock was frozen.  
Lincoln spoke from the heart  
And marched with the angels.  
Bellamy strove to hasten the dawn;  
The multitude slumbered.  
Wells beat a drum  
Till the grass came creeping.  
Shaw burnished a lamp  
Which lighted far corners.  
Debs, Hardie, Woodsworth, Bevan  
And a cordon of voices that girdled the earth  
Spoke to the wind.  
Clearly and imperishably  
The word has resounded  
With trumpet notes searching  
The farthermost reach of the land and the waters;  
And, like sloths in the jungle,  
We hang upside down from the tree of inertia;  
Forgetting all we have heard,  
Greeting the sunrise with third-rate desires  
And wondering  
(Giver of Light, how we wonder!)  
What power over matter will loosen our clutch;  
And waiting,  
Waiting  
For one who remembers  
The way to the uplands,  
Where beauty and wisdom foregather  
And attest to the worth of our days.

\*Men are born in order to assist one another

### PROFIT AND LOSS

Ten thousand bales of goods were made  
And countless thousands more;  
The profits gild a paradise  
Along a tropic shore.

The people cry for hospitals  
And housing for the poor,  
But Plutus tongues an iron command  
In accents loud and dour.

Have mercy, Light, and concentrate  
Upon the mind in chains  
That labors, not to free itself  
But to ensure its pains.

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### THE DELTA

Time was when there was scope for every man  
To toil and share the glitter in the pan,  
And bells rang out. How pleasant was the shade  
Which recompensed the ache and blest the glade  
Where plenty dwelt, and hearts were undistressed  
By drear anxieties to quell the zest.  
Earth's dream was rich with visioned wealth and soon  
A waking would occur and grant the boon  
To all who labored in sweet order's field  
That each might savor the abundant yield.

But time defers and knowledge fails the pace  
That speeds the wisdom and achieves the grace.  
Dissension rises and bestirs a dust  
Which clouds the judgment and misleads the trust.  
When leaders stray and lose the common touch  
The meek have little and the rest too much.  
The horn is servant to the ruling hand  
And dull ears harken to a stone command  
To tend the cattle that demean the shrine,  
And purge heretics who disown the kine.  
Powers that bluster in cold Heaven's sight  
Condone the plunder and deny the right  
To thrive by labor and to share the thing  
Which Nature offers that the heart may sing.  
The dark has pilfered what the light revealed

And Plutus swaggers in a ravished field.  
The shoot that flourished in a lost estate  
Now seeks the raindrop in an arid fate.

The smiling river which coursed on with glee  
To join the waters of an unknown sea  
Now owns an apathy that slows an age  
And bares its image on a sickly page.  
The sum of living now is borne along  
To shape a delta and submerge the song  
That tells of virtue in a hopeful way  
And urges gropers to a richer day.  
A primal monster with an ugly aim  
Bestrides the delta and upholds the shame  
While wisdom founders in a depthless mire  
Which wrests a bounty from a wrong desire.  
How foul the guidance which persuades the nose  
To relish odors that make ill the rose.

Fleet be the joy when law ensures the pain  
And justice stands aside to pleasure gain.  
The captains come and go and chiefs depart,  
But custom perseveres and blights the mart;  
Too slim the wallet and too high the cost;  
The pomp but squanders what the labor lost.  
A heritage denied is man's disgrace  
And prompts sad Heaven to avert its face.  
See now the wavelets lapping at pale lips  
While fortune hacks a log and offers chips  
To rescue those who struggle in a flood  
That flows to spread the virus in the blood.

Behold the delta in a grayish light  
Where black makes union with unwilling white  
And misdeeds prosper in a river's silt  
That smears the swimmer and reveals the guilt.  
A phantom vessel rides the waves of time  
And plucks the favored from the roiling grime.  
The rest tread water and repair the hope

Some whim of fortune will provide a rope  
To tow them onward in a gilded wake  
That lures the seeker, and inspires the ache  
To win bright passage to a port of ease  
Where harsh winds peter to a soothing breeze.  
Let vain aspirants importune the skies —  
The ship in the delta is scant in size.  
When reason wavers and defaults the deed  
The whole earth trembles for the human need.

Turn now, sweet wind, and sweep the delta clean  
And cool the temper that impairs the sheen.  
Disperse the mist where muddy currents flow,  
Fill out the sail, give all mankind a tow.  
Blow peace and love where angry water seethes  
And joyously wherever virtue breathes.  
Bring us soft music to abate our sighs  
And grace to win what shadowland denies;  
Reclaim the sky: dispel the black and gray,  
Break out the sun that it may show the way.

## 16

## PROBLEM

This crisscross tempest, this brawling of waters  
bursting the levee to deepen the bog,  
and thinning the patience of time;  
this futile chase: pursuing the aniseed of illusion,  
loud with the expectancy of braying brethren  
scenting the green hill;  
this feast of the gullible savoring promises  
and disgorging the splinters of marrowless bones;  
hell wakes refreshed by slumber  
which hungers the meek and sustains the custom —  
as money arms the knave and nature endows the cheat  
with the guile of the fox and the aim of the weasel;  
for the skin and the can are testaments to manipulation  
and the measure of wisdom that comforts the soul  
with the down of the bird and the juice of the tree.

Surely the gods are shivered  
by the depth of the night  
and the chill of the dawn  
that comes over the rim  
like ghostly fingers grappling vainly  
with the black hordes of history.

Behold the nightshade of iniquity  
flowering in soil  
that casts up the heavenly seed.  
I would suffer the nail and thorn  
to bring health to the garden;  
but my exhortations to the tribe  
would be as echoes in a deserted canyon;  
neither would my anguish move the bleak mountain,  
nor lower its stature,  
nor stay the fall of the multitude  
bearing banners to the precipice.  
Yet there is comfort and justice in the universe:  
defection rides pillion with the will that preserves the folly  
while the goodness of the earth is secured  
like corroding treasure on the floor of the sea.  
Not till the mountain crumbles  
and the sun stands forth  
shall the world come to understanding  
and make the broad gesture.

#### THE SPECK AND THE GLORY

First was the speck motionless in space;  
the Will within it stirred  
and the speck found union in dust  
and spun as a fiery ball;  
the heavens breathed and the ball cooled  
and out of the mist Earth was come.  
The sun wrought and the clouds begat the waters;  
the Hand rested and Law took eminence  
and the Spirit was present in every leaf and creature,

in the core of the earth and the snow on the mountain.  
Nature strove and abundance was as a bright look  
on a countenance of many moods.

The sea conceived and a spinal mite emerged  
to crown the crawl and pulse a miracle,  
and life was sweet in the kernel.

Virgin in aim and whole in heart,  
men shared with one another  
and assisted one and all over the torn places;  
and the breast was closed to the poison-tooth  
which divides and corrupts  
and blights the tree of generations.  
Light shone and man stood out,  
like a shaft of hope on a sad hill,  
as the seeker of knowledge and keeper of wisdom;  
and the Giver of all took heart, being pleased with His works  
and the good in store for the imaged ones.

Yet among the many there rose up the few  
who were more advanced in guile  
and bitten deep with desire  
to seek the cool of the glade  
while the toilers tilled the fields;  
and a dark spirit grew upon them  
with the stealth of serpents,  
till greed bore witness  
to huge claims in luscious valleys  
and power to hoard  
and deny abundance.

When Reason spoke Ignorance reared  
and strife dimmed the way which is upward.  
The men of guile,  
being as beasts that waylay their own hearts,  
clothed cunning customs in comely cloaks;  
so that more and more of the mean in spirit  
and faint in faith  
became as kneelers before stones  
and doers of that which is pleasing to idols.

Thus it came to pass that Reason  
was as a gagged tongue in a loud confusion.  
With their statue-eyes blank to the gleam,  
the men of guile acquired legal dominion  
and grew strong in arms  
and as the knife's edge in vigilance,  
and stopped the mouths of all who were stern set  
and spoke out against thieves.

Pleas and arguments were as petty blows to granite  
and the Earth walked round the sun full many times  
while justice dwelt in a never land  
and hope was sore in the breast.

A growl went up  
and the toilers put down their spades  
and went forth with pinched stomachs and empty hands  
to battle for just portions  
and places to lay their heads.

But the guileful ones,  
being fat in resource and paupered in mercy,  
assembled legions of hirelings who struck foul blows  
till the hungry fell, or cringed  
and limped to their labors.

Such was the harvest of storm:  
lo, Goodness, which braves the blast afoot,  
and Evil, which rides it down  
hurrahing the sins of centuries.  
Yet Nature throve and the grain of the field  
and the fruit of the bough shed tears  
while Love stood famished;  
and harmony became as a log that flames and smoulders  
and doles its warmth to them that shiver.

O world that wilts and knows not its strength!  
O world that clutches and treasures wrong things!  
Law has its rendezvous with time  
and brims a crater which spills a vengeance  
more mysterious and just  
than molten belchings of fiery mountains.  
Behold in this present how ills have bred

a godless horde that strives for eminence  
in the sand that is quick and merciless,  
and challenges the hosts who chant with double-tongues  
and exhibit their souls while temple walls shudder.  
Twin evils are but offspring of the pit that flames  
and burns the years  
to heap the ashes of illusion.

What but the love can stay the claw that rends?  
O spurned and saddened power!  
take rise, persist, persuade, however long;  
dethrone, destroy this snarling shape  
which bares its fangs within  
and halts that joining men despair of, or disdain.  
With gory stroke disowned  
how shall the peaceful ones make end of slaughter;  
must those who salvage hope from savage seas  
disfigure their own brows, like Cain,  
and come to shipwreck in the wake of victory?

There is a consciousness of misted things  
no mind may probe entire,  
a knowingness that cometh whence no thought may clothe,  
yet in the dream reveals  
a world where ignorance eateth up its root  
and knowledge births a bliss.  
Let Christ and Lincoln walk again  
in leadership which treads a stainless rim  
and liberates sad science that it may yet bestow  
one half the mind and strength it pawns for arms  
on bright research  
and fit blank walls with doorless frames;  
and half to that which lighted art communicates  
and time hands on.  
Out of the riven black will burst a glory  
which shall consume the doubt  
and light the trek to the rich mountain,  
where wisdom pours a golden avalanche  
and clears all debts away

save that to Him that raises all men up  
that they may stand above the vain pursuit  
and in the thirsting here and now  
achieve a verdant unity.

18

### STATUS QUO

Will you never understand  
why I pity your works  
and despise your complacency?  
Is it beyond the wits of the tribe  
to share the revolt  
which outshone the star?  
Light spoke from a hilltop,  
but the chief and the clod  
with the green crackle in their ears  
munch the sweets of illusion.

Shall I tell you of the time  
when I forsook the slumber —  
when you locked the gate  
and sent the shorn ones home  
to crush the joy on children's faces,  
and contemplate the stone that stunned.  
Shall I tell you of the marauder  
fierce with a ballpoint,  
who assessed a phantom value  
and exacted larger tribute  
from a soup-bone  
cleaner than a buzzard's effort  
on a desert floor?

Would you believe  
that your arrogance  
furnished fuel for the lamp?  
You should have burned the libraries  
and preserved the ashes  
to adorn the brows of the uninstructed.  
In the street of gropers

I discovered a radiance  
under an arch  
which led to a path up a mountain.  
I borrowed freely from the ages  
to make bright the journey;  
and truth exhaled,  
dispelling harmful vapors.

The cycle goes round and round,  
like folly in orbit,  
and aspires to eternity.  
Your garments are strained  
with the fat of your ribs.  
You are ripe with resource  
for a plumed advance  
to beget a future  
which will look back upon  
the present  
as a faithless age  
that jilted wisdom  
to embrace a strumpet.  
You are stout in arms to march on need,  
but the banner is folded  
and the route deserted —  
except  
for footsore ranks  
and a few skirmishers  
who repair to the mercy of the shadows  
to scrape their eyes,  
and lament with the sun  
the impenetrable grottoes  
that house the Establishment.

### THE MONKEYS' ELECTION

A host of monkeys hunkered 'round  
To hear the party chiefs expound  
Momentous issues.

A big baboon, who knew the score,  
Dwelt luringly upon the lore  
Of more bananas.

The monkeys rose with happy cheers;  
Reserving dirty looks and jeers  
For the dissenters.

For some, it seemed, were more regaled  
With news of coconuts, and wailed  
Their high disfavor.

This monkey-shine awoke unrest  
In many, whose experience stressed  
A plenitude of neither.

Unorganized, the hungry clan  
Could only sit and sourly scan  
Sculduggery in action.

On voting day, with verdict sealed,  
Five years too late the monkeys squealed;  
Lamenting fate, and dreams

Of bigger nuts and better fruit,  
Of leisure born of evil's root  
And more auspicious weather.

## LEMON IN THE COFFEE

So, lusty swaggerer,  
you are here again  
to slay my rest  
and foist upon the human race  
another witless day;  
lugging the victim from the down  
to plod and prowl  
and snatch and growl,  
and pry three squares from nature's clutch —  
for what?

If I had sense I'd turn my back  
and court again the velvet black  
that comforts me.

What know you of the creaks and aches  
that ape perennials  
and flourish in my bones;  
the ghastly din that splits my ears  
when you and your remote control  
bestir the pestiferous clock  
that rives the bliss with stealthy shock,  
nor gives me time to scratch my hives  
before I rise to grab, and miss, the worm.

Your baleful eye betrays a spleen  
that wilts the locks of hag and queen  
and wrecks goodwill all down the line;  
hauling me forth to climb a hill  
(when all the time I might lie still)  
so that I may slide down again  
to where I was  
and fumigate my soul against your foul return.

A man might better dig a hole  
and emulate the happy mole  
that knows the boon of endless night.

How often you have sweltered me  
while I, fool ox, toiled in the field.  
You burn my face and parch my throat

and sear the corn and scorch the oat.  
You snitch the moisture from the earth  
and from the sea that gave us birth,  
and boil the dream in vinegar.  
If you had wit you'd poke your nose  
down where the loot-tree sprouts and grows  
and root it out.  
Someday I aim to light a fuse  
which shall retrieve what you abuse  
and blow you high.  
But as for now, I trade in woe,  
dispelling one that two may grow;  
and look for dusk to nip your tail  
as you skulk down behind the hills,  
so that I may return to bed  
to stretch my toes in ecstasy  
and dream that you are dead.

'Twixt fire and ice there's little choice,  
but still the world might well rejoice  
if it could settle for the rain  
and never see your mug again —  
you misbegotten offspring of the skies!

#### BOOT AND STRAP

Put down the book of fool pretense  
and look at life with knowing eyes;  
observe the sweated round  
that aches the fibre  
and measures the success with ciphers:  
these unpretentious ones, these toilers  
whose joys are those of passers-by  
who glimpse a pleasant scene;  
whose prospects deck a future  
with traitor skies of promise.  
How profitless the whirl of fate,

which, like the potter's wheel,  
spins on to doomed objectives:  
pot or flesh  
the clay returns to clay.

In this drenched world  
brave blooms forever spring  
to wither in the salty drop eternally:  
the phantom hoard eludes pursuit  
and dreams become as vacant rinds  
that wait the scavenger.  
Brainwashed, and unaware  
his span is shaped to haggard ends,  
the toiler props the dike  
till silent waters overflow  
and he is borne resistlessly  
to founder on the reef of age  
and limp ashore  
to comb the beach of drear privation.  
Denuded, scrapped,  
in this abundant land  
fate deeds a narrow place  
and grants at cost  
the charity of peace and silence.

O you! who from the cushioned height  
look down with scorn  
upon the driven ones  
crowding  
the rutted track to leaner pastures  
with bared fangs of necessity  
flashing at their heels;  
you who dice the public loaf  
and split the winedrop  
in unholy eucharist,  
you who spray the coat impeccable  
and consecrate a structure  
strewn with bones

and little wisps of wool;  
what say you to the cry:  
O sheep and lamb!  
was it for this He made thee?

How shall it be with master minds  
when willing hands are tied  
and the bright earth becomes as wilderness?  
What will they rule when chaos strikes  
and each is on his own?  
Shall bread and wealth and power  
pour from the frigid void  
or vanish with the workmen?  
Who then will bend to other wills  
and serve the dark assassin:  
this lust of self, these sickly fears,  
these daggers wild of hate and violence?  
Shall leaders fall upon themselves  
and numbers dwindle to a lone survivor?  
King of a fruitless earth,  
what hand or thought will comfort him  
when naught but growls erupt from the computer?

I hear my name  
and undertones from upper reaches:  
“Dull ox,  
come lick your nose  
and bend an ear,  
nor fret about the manger.  
We shall preserve the slob —  
these dupes and clods and serfs —  
lest heaven tumble,  
and we shall soothe their pains:  
contain their wits with brews and sports  
and drama’s scourings,  
and grant them precious dreams  
of shiny cans with bubble tops  
and mansions

more vivid than the stars  
that light the eyes of children.

“Let there be credit  
more plentiful than all the flakes of winter,  
great mounds of debt, yea, higher than the Rockies,  
with bright new pinnacles of bold per cent  
and rocket flights of taxes.  
And let the grip be firmer on the bootstrap  
that all who tug may well contrive  
to lift their gaze, if not their feet,  
and see the lovely trees  
that hide the morass;  
and, verily, as Heaven’s hand malingers  
we who drive will prosper.”

Dull ox  
impervious to sham.  
I switch my tail  
and ponder the inevitable day  
when the boot outwears the strap  
and the straining host comes up  
with the shreds of its illusions.

## FLIGHT TO GLORY

Consider these, the night-bound birds,  
roosting like drowsy fowls on sagging boughs;  
dreaming of bat-hung grottoes  
instead of skies reserved for larks  
and pinnacles of splendor.  
Wake! songless ones;  
'tis better to dare flight to nowhere  
than peck drug-laden corn.  
Take off, while heaven holds its breath  
and hell prepares the fowling-piece,  
and exercise atrophied wings;  
attend the cluttered throat  
till rich untrammelled tones

break wild and sweet and clear,  
like silver chimes caroling the federation;  
before God-gifted powers depart  
and ravens come to croak disdain  
and turn away from that inglorious perch  
where songs unuttered swell the guilty silence.

23

### CRITERION

Poet, is it success you crave:  
the fame emblazoned in a woven sky,  
that tinsel spiders may outsheen the sun  
and waken world acclaim.  
Walk, then, not on the mountain  
but in the foothills and the fen.

Discard the snowy robe,  
strike up the lyre and tell of ecstasy —  
of eager probe and hungry aperture.  
'Tis all that matters if  
you would be touted literary  
and qualify for squandering the grant —  
puffing long perfectos on sunny decks —  
and filching laurels.

Reck not of cherry stains that smear the lily  
or honor's drought that droops the rose;  
the nightshade and the mandrake flourish.  
Distil the mash with passion's heat  
and drench the page.

Attend the credo that denies the light:  
there is no one above who cares,  
who sees or overhears;  
no pathway to the peak of bliss  
except the route flesh offers.  
Seize fast the moment and indulge

the contact, for it is all  
that man may steal from doom  
to vindicate the perfumed life  
of this unsullied age.

Fear not the clod with the extinguisher;  
there are no unchaste words  
in lust's pure lexicon,  
no need to douse the darting flame;  
the fire is self-consuming.  
The fault is in the stomach  
of him that retches at the savory salad  
and disgorges on the way  
to levels unachieved by minks and rabbits.  
Seek, then, for beauty in the open house  
where life's creative burst goes down the drain,  
and speed the pen.

Do this and you will have it made  
till time's forgetfulness  
shall sink the grave the deeper  
that stifled grass may breathe again  
and virtue's pansy lift its face  
to dew that is the sweeter.

### ACHOO!

I seek a more rewarding note  
Than flows from song bereft of sense;  
I'd rather own a silent throat  
Than offer man no recompense.

These busy bards who burnish junk,  
For which dazed critics have no name,  
And proffer it as art (what bunk)  
But trade the height for lesser fame;

While others spray a sneezing gas  
That racks the blossom on the bough,  
Repelling the discerning mass  
Who seal the purse and cry, "Ehaw!"

Scrawled walls are pure as lily-white  
Compared to parish snipes who run  
Their gutter course without respite  
Till sewers burst and drown the sun.

Roll out my jet and let me go  
And fuel it well for I shall need  
Great thrust at supersonic speed  
To leave this fen so far below

That I shall never make it back,  
Nor sulk with Oscar when his stare  
Takes in the bounding apish pack  
Purveying stench beyond compare.

25

#### DOWN, SIR!

Hark to the yowler in N.B.  
That scanneth with a grudge;  
He'd be a wiser dog if he  
Were not so learned a judge.

26

#### MINUS TWO

She went to church with the top half missing,  
The devil danced when he heard the hissing,  
The pure ones stared till they courted blindness;  
Then the lights went out. It was a kindness.

The walls were stretched, but there was no service;  
The future swarmed and made me nervous.  
The ear confirmed what the wits mistrusted  
When a small voice said, "My V-string's busted."

Then somebody prayed for light in darkness  
The better to view the rounded starkness.  
The plea was met and, oh, what a dither!  
The nymph was gone and the parson with her.

27

### MAGIC IN THE MIST

Wake, fellow-members;  
Let us walk in the sun  
with our toes to the treasury  
and exhibit our virtue:  
let us double our take  
and bring cheer to the aged  
with a peanut gesture.  
Let us fear not the day of wrath,  
nor delay the inspired levy;  
for the pale ones are short in future  
and lean in memory  
and the anger withers  
even as the bounty fades  
in the heavenly mist that screens the magician,  
who retrieves with the left hand  
what the right hand dispenses.  
But for us 'tis a mellow season;  
let us bankrupt our hearts at no cost  
and offer up thanksgiving  
in the hallowed light of a just equation.

28

### OF GUARDIANS AND THE ESTABLISHMENT

Behold the chosen who exalt the loan  
Of power to govern and divide the bone.  
A day to legislate, a week to stray  
In search of rectitude at higher pay.  
Night without end they croon a hazy song  
And fiddle mightily with right and wrong:

A hut for oldsters, an estate for rooks,  
A twig for heroes, monuments for crooks;  
No peak, no vision, a divided house  
With status frozen like a glacial mouse;  
Success equated with prestige and loot  
And sad trees weeping over shrivelled fruit;  
Truth outmaneuvered by the foes of thought  
And ignorance cheering while banners rot.

Yea, Lord, they praise thee for the temple rout,  
Then sprint to the altar where tape runs out.

29

### DIRGE FOR A BYTOWN WARRIOR

Advance to the rear, malingerer —  
you with your back to the line  
and your chest to the decoration;  
the unfought battle is over,  
the banners are feasting the moth  
and the shoddy is late at the mill.

You and the thud and the silent echo;  
you had prime years to part the mountain  
and lead the march; but behold  
the nibbling gait: munching juicy grasses,  
like a truant horse trailing the traces,  
while a nation stared at the waiting plow;  
stubborn years with a tack hammer  
shoring a house which comes apart  
and stirs a dust that grieves the sun;  
even though the people groaned  
and winter moaned in the chimney  
and the gaunt hearth heaped no ashes.

Forward to your memoirs  
and a slab in the stillness,  
where only stars may weep and overhear  
your apologies for a rusted sceptre.  
May the winds of change bring sweetness

and dispel the memory  
and give life to halted feet and muted drums,  
oh, shielder of the guilty  
and defender of the stolen pasture.

30

### THE ABSENTEES

See now the truant ones who gender hurt  
And personate the insect in the shirt  
Of shirked affairs and miseries of State,  
Pursuing hidden seams while duties wait;  
Fleeing like stowaways from docking ships  
When private itches burn to rake more chips  
And pleasure's call is heard above the drone  
Of dullness which gives stress to Hansard's tone.  
How, then, shall effort win a brighter round  
And loyalty tongue notes of sweeter sound  
Than absent trumpeters have ever blown,  
Or sprout a richer seed than self has sown;  
Or virtue garnish history with spells  
Of love's release from undefeated hells?

The green men mass full eighteen thousand strong  
To halt the forward thought and to prolong  
The frittered day of idle hope, and ban  
The grand march of integrity to span  
A world transformed; and spare man from the rim  
Where he jumps off in evil hours so grim  
Pale faith retires to medicate her wounds  
While reason scans a tortured earth and swoons.  
'Tis not the traitored task alone that screams  
When fugitives trade down for lesser gleams.

31

### O SILENT DRUM!

Lord, what a heaven earth would be  
If those who call the turn  
Would head the march on poverty  
And tilt the gravy urn.

### IF THIS BE ALL

If this be all, this bilking and this butting,  
 This parching urge for place;  
 How cool the night that cometh with the shutting  
 Of silk in narrow space.

If this be all, the height is but the measure  
 Of the descent we make  
 When withered clutch relinquishes the treasure  
 It strove for — to forsake.

### REQUIEM FOR JUSTICE

I shall not weep for those who serve the gloom  
 And spurn the light  
 That they may prosper till the fated boom  
 Reveals its plight.

Nor shall I weep for those who reach the peak  
 And blaze with class  
 Only to tumble farther than the meek  
 To nourish grass.

I save my tears for those, who, like the ox,  
 Obey the prod,  
 Viewing the depredations of the fox  
 And chiding God.

### NIGHT AT SEA

Empress that drifts in circles where spumed rocks  
 Abound and wait, the storm persists. The night  
 Holds not a single star. The engine balks  
 And gales of rancor buffet you. Your plight  
 Stirs not a whisper of remorse. The trough  
 Grows deep, the mast is dipped in the unknown.  
 A seam has opened and the power is off;  
 The yacht has passed and you are on your own.

Pale harmony is torn with discontent,  
The leaf forlorn droops in dissension's air;  
No song is heard save one that makes lament  
For leadership that fails the silent prayer.  
Who now will rise and take the wheel and press  
Forever on to seas that make redress?

35

### IMPAIRED DRIVER

Remorseless, he pursued self-seeking ways.  
Ungrateful for the breath of life, his praise  
Withheld, his ears estranged from sighs within,  
Enthralled with place and fame, at ease with sin;  
High fortune rode with him. His wish was law  
Until the fog unwrapped him and he saw  
Too late the ice that spun him round and round  
To find a solitude in narrow ground.

### DISTILLED VERSE

36

### GOLDEN MEAN

More for the few, nil for the queue.

37

hoodlum

debased . . . erased

38

### SECURITY

"Go away, worm!"

39

### WHEN? (labor song)

When shall we see the beauty  
of the ancient truth  
that trails the throng so patiently —

we who keen the dark,  
or live apart,  
or turn away.

The night is our undoing  
and our hollow hearts  
shut out the echo.

When shall we stir to wisdom's touch  
and shed these covers of indifference  
that corrupt our bones?

Are we forever brother to the clod?  
Piecemeal the bloodless monster  
devours the castaways of fortune:  
these scrapped ones  
whose woe is ours tomorrow.

Conditioned, we author our own harm;  
debt's spectre struts in borrowed robes  
that cloak the snare  
and there is small escape.

Yet we are vast in numbers  
and our strength, unused,  
is as the movement of the sea.

Come let us leave the darkling ship  
and strike out for a new land  
where progress marches in the sun  
and rackets perish in the snows of virtue;  
let us storm the granite heights  
that prop the cloud  
and the glory that was Dunkirk  
will be as a single flash of guidance  
on the hidden stair.

Hear me now—  
the shirkers and the gropers—  
the monster's jaws crunch louder with each day  
and its leer predicts a future  
where dust inters the dream.

Yet you cry:  
“Go scrub your wits, foolish one;

the politicians will reform, come sunup,  
and woe will disappear."

I tell you the candle sputters  
in the night wind  
and the dawn will leave dark shadows  
on the land and on our faces.  
You have tuned out truth,  
but me you shall not silence;  
for I will speak from the highest tower  
and from the grass that covers me.  
In the still of the night  
when you toss  
and fear the morrow,  
in the press of the day  
when you strive for half a loaf,  
at the close of the year  
when you ponder the sagging scale  
and the aging tree,  
in your prayers when you cry out  
and wake no answer;  
when the gate is locked  
and the unjust hour is upon you  
it is me you will hear  
calling, begging, urging, prodding  
you  
to marshal the power of the spirit,  
which dwells in the eternal  
and is death to the lie,  
and go forth in full strength  
that life may be worth the breathing  
and the boon worth the effort  
and the sacrifice.

Throughout the earth  
the brass heart looks down on you  
as those of small account.  
But you are builders and makers  
with sceptres for the reaching

and the divine in your essence,  
with untold potential  
to round out the miracle that is life  
and be keeper of all your affairs.

Get with it and surpass the ant,  
you with the hopes that die in your faces,  
you who stand and lift up your praises  
to solidarity  
and sit down on your hands  
with the lead crushing them to numbness,  
you who bow to a rod  
and plead with a stone  
that has no answers.

Stand by with the heart that prances,  
yea, even to prison  
and the ultimate agony,  
and assist one another.

Come with your swarms of metal birds,  
come with your ships and amphibians  
and your little boats innumerable,  
your rafts and your spars  
with purposed shapes clinging,  
and your reserves of valor;  
for the beachhead that calls is demanding  
as a foothold in paradise.

Nor fear that in unity  
there is wasteland  
but a crop that matures  
with all things needful  
to a shining security.

But what do I hear from the dockside and the hills—  
a great murmur and brave shouts,  
or a chiding from the bog?  
'Go scrub your wits, foolish one;  
the politicians will reform, come sunup,  
and woe will disappear.'





PS                  Adams, Percy Miller  
8501                Song of the scorpion  
D35S6

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